PERPLEXITY FOR CCRC RESIDENTS

Your Personal Assistant That Uses AI

Mel Haas

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CivicGoodBooks

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Introduction — Meet Your Personal Assistant

Imagine a new kind of personal assistant — one who never sleeps, never gets impatient, and knows a little about almost everything. You do not meet this assistant at the mailboxes or in the dining room. You meet them on your computer, tablet, or phone. You type a question, and they answer in plain language. You ask a follow-up, and they explain it again, a different way.

That assistant is Perplexity — a personal assistant that uses artificial intelligence (AI) to find, sort, and explain information for you. It is free, it is patient, and it is available any hour of the day or night.

This book shows how residents of Continuing Care Retirement Communities (CCRCs) can use Perplexity, their personal AI assistant, to:

- Understand health information without panic.
- Make better decisions about money and everyday purchases.
- Handle everyday hassles like bills, forms, and gadgets.
- Strengthen relationships with children, grandchildren, and friends.
- Enjoy games, music, TV, and hobbies more deeply.
- Participate in civic life and help teach others.

You do not need to be "good with computers." If you can send an email or search the web, you already have enough skill to start. The goal is not to turn you into a technician. The goal is to give you a friendly, capable assistant for daily life.

The chapters ahead are short and are ordered by how often you are likely to reach for this assistant — starting with health, money, and daily hassles, and ending with hobbies, teaching, and civic life. Read them in order, or jump straight to what you need today.

A Very Short Picture of How It Works

You do not need to understand computers to use this assistant well. Here is the whole idea in four steps:

- You ask a plain-English question.
- Perplexity quickly reads many current, trustworthy sources — the way a fast, tireless research assistant would.
- It writes you a short, clear answer and shows exactly where the information came from.
- You ask it to explain again, go deeper, or make it simpler — as many times as you like, with no impatience.

That is the whole picture. Ask, read, ask again.

How to Reach Your Assistant

- On a computer or tablet: open a web browser and type perplexity.ai in the address bar.
- On a phone or tablet: install the free Perplexity app from the app store if you prefer.
- You can use it without an account. A free account lets you save your history.

What the Free Version Can Do

The free version is surprisingly capable. It lets you:

- Ask unlimited “quick” questions on almost any topic.

- Get answers in full sentences, not computer code.
- See which sources were used, and click them if you want.
- Ask follow-up questions in the same conversation.
- Use a few "Pro" searches each day with stronger models.

This book focuses on the free version. You can do everything described here without paying a cent.

How It Feels to Use

You type a question such as:

> *"Explain atrial fibrillation in plain language for an older adult."*

Your assistant replies in a few short paragraphs. Then you say:

> *"Explain that more simply, and list questions I should ask my doctor."*

It responds again — no sighs, no impatience, no rush. That is the experience this book invites you to explore.

Chapter 1: Make Perplexity a Daily Habit

You will not learn Perplexity by reading manuals. You will learn it by using it. Here is a simple plan to make your new assistant a friendly daily habit.

Step 1 — One Question Every Morning

After breakfast, open Perplexity and ask one small question about something that matters today:

- Summarize today's main news stories in plain English.
- Give me three gentle stretching exercises for older adults with limited balance.
- Explain what my A1C number means in simple terms.

Nothing fancy. One real question.

Step 2 — Always Ask a Follow-Up

Whatever answer you get, ask at least one follow-up:

- Say that more simply.
- What does this mean for someone in their eighties?
- What are the first three steps I should take this week?

Follow-ups are where Perplexity becomes a conversation instead of a one-time search.

Step 3 — Ask Before You Get Frustrated

Make a quiet rule: “Before I get frustrated, I will ask Perplexity.”

Confusing bill? Strange setting on your phone? New policy letter? Ask your assistant to explain before your blood pressure rises.

Step 4 — Share One Thing You Learned

Tell a friend or family member:

- I asked Perplexity about my new medication, and here is what I learned.
- Perplexity helped me figure out how to enlarge the text on my tablet.

Sharing reinforces your habit and spreads the benefits.

Step 5 — Keep Your Judgment on the Throne

Perplexity is a helper, not a boss.

- Check health decisions with your doctor.
- Check financial decisions with a professional.
- Check spiritual decisions with trusted guides.

Bring your life experience, values, and common sense to every answer. That partnership — your wisdom plus your assistant's information — is where the power lies.

Chapter 2: Health and Peace of Mind

Health questions can create anxiety, especially when new words and numbers appear in test results and reports. Perplexity cannot and should not replace medical professionals, but as your personal assistant, it can reduce fear and increase understanding.

Understanding Diagnoses

Ask your assistant:

- Explain [diagnosis] in plain language for an older adult.
- List typical symptoms and common treatments.
- What questions should I ask my doctor about this?

You are not asking for a second opinion. You are asking for a clear explanation so you can talk with your doctor more confidently.

Medications and Side Effects

Type the drug name and ask:

- What is this medication, what is it for, and what side effects should I watch for?
- What should I ask my pharmacist about this medication?

You can even paste part of a medication sheet and say, “Explain this in simple language.”

Lab Results and Numbers

You might see numbers such as A1C 6.8, eGFR 55, or LDL 120.

- What does this lab number mean, and what range is considered normal?
- What lifestyle changes might help improve this number?

Then discuss what you learn with your clinician.

Preparing for Appointments

Before a visit, you can ask:

- What are good questions to ask a cardiologist about [your condition]?
- What should I ask before agreeing to [procedure]?

Write down or print the list and bring it to your appointment so you do not forget in the moment.

Caring for Your Emotional Health

Your assistant can:

- Suggest coping strategies for anxiety, loneliness, or grief.
- Offer simple breathing, relaxation, or mindfulness practices.
- Suggest how to talk with family about your health without causing unnecessary alarm.

Used wisely, it becomes a bridge between an overwhelming system and your own calm, informed decisions.

Chapter 3: Money, Paperwork, and Planning

Money and paperwork do not become simpler with age. Insurance forms, tax rules, and estate documents can be intimidating. Your assistant can help you understand the landscape so you can work more effectively with professionals.

Explaining Financial Products

Ask:

- Explain a fixed annuity versus an immediate annuity in plain English for an older adult.
- What are the pros and cons of using CDs instead of bonds for someone in retirement?

You are not asking for personalized investment advice; you are asking for education.

Clarifying Insurance and Medicare

You can ask:

- Explain the difference between Original Medicare and Medicare Advantage in simple terms.
- What is prior authorization, and how might it affect older adults?

When you receive letters with dense language, paste a paragraph and say, “Explain this plainly.”

Taxes and Deductions

Your assistant can outline:

- Common medical expenses older adults might be able to deduct.
- Differences between federal and state rules in broad terms.
- Questions to bring to a tax preparer or to tax software.

Estate Planning Terms

You might ask:

- What is the difference between a will and a revocable living trust?
- What is a durable power of attorney for healthcare?

When you understand the terms, meetings with attorneys become far more productive.

Organizing Information for Family

Your assistant can help you create:

- A checklist of documents to gather (wills, insurance policies, account lists).
- A simple one- or two-page "information sheet" for your health care proxy or executor.

That preparation is a gift to both you and your family.

Chapter 4: Everyday Life Made Easier

Beyond health and money, your assistant can smooth the small daily hassles that nibble away at your time and patience.

Comparing Products Before You Buy

You can say:

- Compare these two rollator walkers for an older adult with limited balance. Include pros, cons, and approximate prices.
- Compare high-contrast TV remote controls that are easy to see and press.

Perplexity will summarize information from multiple sites in one place.

Understanding Bills and Statements

Paste confusing sections of medical bills, utility bills, or service contracts, then ask, “Explain these charges in plain language.”

Use the explanation to decide what to question or dispute.

Solving Technology Annoyances

- On a Windows 11 computer, how do I make all text larger for easier reading?
- On an Android phone, how do I stop getting notifications from a certain app?
- How do I change my email password on Gmail?

Your assistant can give step-by-step instructions tailored to your device.

Recipes, Meals, and Shopping Lists

Ask for:

- Simple weekly menus for one or two people.
- Recipes that match your health needs (low-sodium, diabetic-friendly, etc.).
- Creative ideas for using leftovers so food is not wasted.

You can also ask for a combined shopping list for the recipes you like.

Planning Errands and Short Outings

Your assistant can suggest:

- Accessible nearby attractions with light walking and places to sit.
- Tips for making long days easier, such as water, snacks, and rest breaks.

Daily life becomes smoother when you are not constantly reinventing the wheel.

Chapter 5: Family, Children, and Grandchildren

Family connections are precious. Your assistant can help you strengthen those relationships, even across distance and generations.

Writing to Grandchildren

Ask for:

- Help me write a warm, one-page letter to my 10-year-old grandson, asking about his hobbies and telling him I am proud of him.
- Give me three short questions I can ask my teenage granddaughter that are not just ‘How is school?’

Use the drafts as starting points and adjust until they sound like you.

Storytelling and Bedtime Tales

You can ask:

- Create a gentle bedtime story for a 5-year-old about a curious child and a wise grandparent.

Tell the story in your own voice, adding details from your life.

Understanding What Children Face

Your assistant can explain:

- Basics of anxiety, bullying, social media, and other issues younger generations face.

- Ways grandparents can support children without taking over parenting.

Planning Visits and Holidays

Ask for:

- Plan a three-day visit from adult children, with simple activities, meals, and rest time built in.
- Suggest holiday traditions that work well when older adults tire easily.

Supporting Older Relatives

If you have older siblings or cousins, you can ask:

- What are respectful ways to discuss long-term care options with an independent older adult?

Perplexity can outline approaches, sample phrases, and things to avoid.

Chapter 6: Games, Music, TV, and Fun

Life is not all appointments and paperwork. Your assistant can make leisure richer and more enjoyable.

Games and Puzzles

- Explain the rules of [card or board game] for beginners.
- Give strategy tips for intermediate bridge players.
- Explain common crossword clue types so I can solve more on my own.

It can also suggest brain teasers, riddles, and logic puzzles tailored to your preferred difficulty, or simple games to play with visiting grandchildren.

Music and Audio

Ask for:

- A list of gentle, comforting hymns about hope.
- Big band songs similar to [favorite artist].
- The story behind the song [title].

You can also request playlists around themes — relaxation, gratitude, or memories of a certain decade.

TV, Movies, and Streaming

Your assistant can help you:

- Find shows and movies that match your taste (for example, “uplifting, low-violence stories”).
- Understand confusing plots or character relationships in complex shows.

- Choose family-friendly viewing for visits from children and grandchildren.

Rather than endless scrolling, you get focused suggestions that fit you.

Reading and Learning Something New

Ask for:

- Recommend books or audiobooks similar to [author or title], with a narrator that is easy to follow.
- Explain [a historical event or topic] in a short, engaging way.

A little curiosity, answered on demand, keeps the mind active and engaged.

Chapter 7: Hobbies, Creativity, and Projects

Many hobbies can continue — or even start fresh — later in life, especially when you have a patient assistant to supply ideas, background, and how-to details.

Gardening and Nature

Ask for:

- Container gardening ideas for a sunny balcony in a temperate climate.
- Easy indoor plants that are forgiving if I forget to water occasionally.
- Common backyard birds in my region and how to attract them.

Art, Crafts, and Photography

- Simple watercolor projects for beginners with limited hand strength.
- Knitting or crochet patterns that avoid tiny, fiddly stitches.
- Beginner photography tips for taking better pictures with a phone.

Perplexity can adapt ideas to your physical abilities and materials.

Writing Books, Memoirs, and Talks

Perplexity is excellent at suggesting outlines, providing historical context, and offering supporting quotes. For example:

- Give me a chapter-by-chapter outline for a short memoir focused on turning points in my life.

- Suggest a 10-minute talk on gratitude in later life, with three main points and supporting scriptures.

You remain the storyteller; your assistant helps structure and support your work.

Small Projects with Big Impact

Your assistant can help you plan:

- A short booklet of family recipes.
- A printed collection of family stories or letters for grandchildren.
- A simple handbook for new residents about "what I wish I had known in my first month."

Chapter 8: Teaching, Leading, and Helping Others

Some residents enjoy teaching and mentoring. Others simply find themselves in informal leadership roles — people ask them questions, come to them for advice, or look to them for information. Perplexity amplifies your ability to help.

Designing Simple Classes and Workshops

You can ask:

- Create an outline for a one-hour class introducing Perplexity to older adults who are nervous about technology.

Your assistant will suggest a sequence of topics, example questions to demonstrate, and simple handouts you can prepare.

Creating Resource Guides

It can help you compile:

- Short guides on avoiding scams.
- Checklists for moving into a retirement community.
- Simple introductions to email, texting, or video calls.

You can share these as printed pages, PDFs, or small booklets.

Supporting Peer-to-Peer Help

Your assistant can:

- Suggest “office hours” formats where residents help each other with phones, tablets, and computers.

- Provide scripts and guidelines for volunteers who want to teach without taking over.

Encouraging Others to Try Perplexity

You can ask it to:

- Draft a friendly one-page invitation or flyer encouraging neighbors to try Perplexity.
- Suggest ways to reassure people who are anxious about technology or privacy.

The result is a community where residents help residents, with Perplexity quietly supporting the effort in the background.

Chapter 9: Politics, Activism, and Your Voice

Older adults carry a lifetime of civic experience. Your assistant can help you use that experience effectively, without being overwhelmed by noise.

Understanding Issues Calmly

Ask:

- Explain the main arguments for and against [policy issue] in neutral language.
- What are possible impacts of [issue] on older adults?

Seeing multiple sides clearly lowers the temperature and raises the quality of discussion.

Writing to Elected Officials

Your assistant can help you identify the right official, draft respectful letters in your own voice, and include specific, concrete requests. You might ask:

- Draft a one-page letter from an older adult in a retirement community, urging protection of long-term care benefits, with a respectful tone.

Preparing Testimony and Comments

For public hearings or written comments, your assistant can:

- Summarize the proposal or issue.
- Help you outline key points.
- Suggest clear language for support or opposition.

Keeping Community Conversations Healthy

Ask for:

- Guidelines for discussing politics in a retirement community without damaging relationships.
- Sample phrases to de-escalate a heated conversation.

Used this way, Perplexity helps you be part of the solution, not the problem.

Chapter 10: Your Next Steps — Write, Share, and Act

You have now seen dozens of ways to use Perplexity, your personal AI assistant, in everyday life:

- For health, to understand and prepare.
- For money and paperwork, to clarify and organize.
- For everyday life, to smooth out daily hassles.
- For family, to communicate and support across generations.
- For fun and hobbies, to enrich games, music, TV, and projects.
- For community and civic life, to teach, help, and speak up.

You do not need to remember every example. Instead, remember three simple moves:

1.

- When you are curious, ask. Health, history, hobbies, news — ask your assistant.
- When you are confused, ask. Bills, forms, policies, device settings — ask for plain-language explanations.
- When you are planning to act, ask. Letters, talks, trips, classes, projects — ask for outlines, ideas, and next steps.

Then bring your own judgment, experience, and values to everything you receive.

Perplexity is free. Your wisdom is not. Put them together and you have something powerful: an older adult who is informed, connected, creative, and still learning.

Open Perplexity. Ask one question today. Then another tomorrow.

The rest of the story is up to you.

About the Author

Mel Haas is 90 years old and lives in a continuing care retirement community in Silver Spring, Maryland. He has published more than a dozen books on topics ranging from civic engagement to technology education for seniors.

Before retiring, Mel worked on early internet infrastructure during the ARPANET era, giving him a long view of how technology shapes society — and how societies can lose control of their own tools if they are not vigilant.

He is a lifelong advocate for democracy, free speech, and the principle that government exists to serve the people, not the other way around.

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